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Sermon Notes

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Free from Anger, Free to Forgive

Ephesians 4:31-32

I did not intend to go this slowly through Ephesians... someone I spoke with this week commented that I am preaching through it as if I'll never preach on Ephesians again... actually, though, I always do that! I never assume I'll have another chance to preach on Isaiah 55 or Philippians 3 or Genesis 12 again... so I want to do the best I can. But the best does not always mean slowing way down and preaching whole sermons on one verse, as I did last week:

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

So... today, I am going to remedy the situation and preach on TWO verses, not just one! Actually this is the rest of last week's sermon...

The grieving of the Spirit comes in many forms, but any sin that violates God's laws and that breaches fellowship between people brings grief to the Holy Spirit of God...

So, we go right into considering these further topics:

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Paul is seeking to address the issues of STUBBORN ANGER and UNFORGIVENESS that destroy so many human relationships.

A Popular Legend:

When I was growing up, I had a book of popular medieval myths, legends, and fairy tales... including many of the Grimms's Brothers famous stories. There was one that stuck with me, and it is a popular tale in many lands and cultures, all over the world

I heard it like this:

There was an older woodsman who lived in a simple hut in the forest with his wife. The two of them had been married for many years and were known to be very stubborn and hotheaded, ready to argue about anything.

One day, as the wife was preparing a meal and the husband was sitting at the table waiting for it, a sudden gust of wind blew open the door. The husband rudely told his wife to close it. She just as rudely answered, "I'm slaving away making your dinner; you close it!" They argued back and forth for a minute, then finally he said, "Whoever speaks the next word will close the door!" They agreed and fell silent. They ate their meal in silence, the door open the whole time. A stray cat walked in, jumped on the table and drank their milk, but neither said a word, or made any movement... they sat back to back, like statues, with their arms crossed across their chests. After the cat left, a dog came in and ate the rest of their small store of meat and left. Neither spoke or made a move. As evening began to fall, a couple of burglars quietly came to the door, looked in and were startled to see these two people, sitting motionless as stones. So, they plundered the house of these two foolish people and left. Evening came, morning, no change. Finally, another set of burglars, emboldened by the open door and the tale they'd heard of this silent couple came and began stealing as well. One of them said, "Well, if they won't say anything, I will take this fine blanket on the bed." It was a richly embroidered bedspread the wife's mother had given them years ago for their wedding. As he was pulling it off the bed, the woman could bear it no longer and cried out, "Husband, will you do nothing?!" He jumped up and said, "I won, I won!! Now you must close the door!"

Now that's a ridiculous story, and perhaps you've heard it in different forms... even worse, perhaps you married couples have lived out your own version of it in your time!

But it is a parable of how BITTERNESS and UNFORGIVENESS and STUBBORN ANGER can open the door for Satan to come in and plunder our house, or our church

The gospel has the power to liberate us, to free us from corrupting anger in every form, and to compel us forcefully to FORGIVE OTHERS as we ourselves have been forgiven

The Spirit's sweet, gentle, peaceful work in us is powerfully effective, making us long-suffering, meek, patient, tender-hearted, gracious and forgiving people

Context:

Ephesians 1-3: The doctrine of our salvation, from eternity past, through the shed blood of Christ, through the hearing of the gospel of our salvation, through to the worldwide building of the church of Christ as a spiritual temple rising to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit

Ephesians 4-6: HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE? Practical Christianity, practical morality

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Amazingly, he goes right into a discussion of UNITY:

Ephesians 4:2-4 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit

Anything that ruptures the unity of the body of Christ grieves the Holy Spirit... anything that harms fellowship between a Christian husband and wife, or between Christian brothers and sisters, is deeply grievous to the Holy Spirit of God

And few things are as destructive to unity as BITTERNESS, ANGER, MALICE, and the resultant UNFORGIVENESS that they breed

The only remedy is for Christians who have been FORGIVEN MUCH to also FORGIVE MUCH!

Ephesians 4:30-32 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

I. The Indwelling Holy Spirit

A. The Person of the Holy Spirit

1. This verse is one of the clearest in the Bible on the PERSONALITY... the PERSONHOOD of the Holy Spirit
2. The verse commands us not to GRIEVE the Holy Spirit of God
3. Hard to understand the TRINITY
4. What is the right way to ask the question? "WHO or WHAT is the Spirit?"
 - a. The Spirit is NOT SOME impersonal force, unifying all living beings... some capacity, some power that flows mindlessly like electricity or the wind
 - b. You don't "tap into" that power, that source, and you are energized in some mindless impersonal way
5. The Holy Spirit is not an IT... He is a person... and Ephesians 4:30 proves it... He is can be GRIEVED

B. The Sealing of the Holy Spirit

... the Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption

1. This “sealing” of the Spirit was already mentioned

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit

The SEALING is a mark of ownership... as though by this, God claims you as His own; it is also a mark of authentication, by which every person can know that he is truly a Christian, and truly destined for heaven... like a letter written by a King was SEALED with wax and his unique signet ring

The sealing of the Spirit is his powerful testimony directly to our hearts that we are children of God

Romans 8:15-16 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

He does this by ministering intimate knowledge of the infinite dimensions of Christ’s love for us DIRECTLY TO OUR HEARTS:

You were : *Sealed for the day of redemption.*

2. Doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit

John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

IN YOU FOREVER!!

C. Deep Gratefulness to the Holy Spirit!!

II. Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

A. So What Does It Mean to “Grieve” the Holy Spirit?

1. The word “grief” is a powerful one

2. It implies deep sorrow... like burying one of your children... the wailing, the sorrow encompassing the hearts of the parents... wave upon wave of emotion, of a blanket of sadness at a great tragedy
3. This word shows the PERSONALITY of the Holy Spirit...
4. He is not an abstract force... he is not electricity, or impersonal power like the inanimate wind...mindless, impersonal
5. NO... he has emotions in the context of a relationship
6. So... what grieves the Holy Spirit of God?
7. In a word, SIN

B. The “Holy” Spirit

1. This is the most common title for the third person of the Trinity

1 Peter 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

2. It points powerfully to perfect purity; he is light, and he hates all darkness

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

3. All sin grieves the Holy Spirit... it is very personal for him, very painful for him, a sense of personal betrayal
4. What specifically grieves him?
 - a. The rupture of the unity of the Spirit through selfishness... when through pride we refuse to consider others ahead of ourselves
 - b. The “acts of the flesh” listed in Galatians 5 grieve the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:19-21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- c. Corrupt and wicked speech grieves the Holy Spirit
- d. Impure thoughts grieve the Holy Spirit...
 - i) Thoughts of anger and unforgiveness toward others

ii) Lust thoughts and covetous thoughts

iii) Having a worldly mind that craves the pleasures of this world more than fellowship with him

e. Failing to follow him into battle with the acts of the flesh

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

f. Failing to listen to the still small voice he uses prompting us to be holy

C. The Spirit is a Dove and a Wind... and a Fire

1. At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended as a dove on Jesus and remained on him

2. At Pentecost, two other images are given us: a wind and a fire

III. Grieving When the Spirit is Grieved

A. If the Spirit is Grieved, So Should We Be

B. It is the Work of the Spirit to Cause Us to Grieve With Him

C. Godly Sorrow is Part of Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

IV. A Life of Tenderhearted Forgiveness in the Spirit (vs. 31-32)

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

A. The Central Work of the Spirit: Supernatural Unity in the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

1. To that end, Paul lists things that deeply grieve the Spirit of God and destroy the unity of the Body

2. Note how Paul follows the same pattern as usual in this chapter

Ephesians 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

PUT OFF THE OLD LIFESTYLE

MADE NEW IN THE MIND

PUT ON THE NEW LIFESTYLE

- a. He clearly describes things that must be GOTTEN RID OF!! The elements of the OLD LIFE that pagans live
- b. Then he describes clearly the elements of the NEW LIFE in Christ that the Spirit works in us instead
- c. He's done this again and again in this chapter:

Ephesians 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Ephesians 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Ephesians 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

3. So also here... get rids of wicked patterns of anger and unforgiveness that will destroy the body of Christ... and instead PUT ON compassion and forgiveness

B. Get Rid of Defiling Sins that Destroy the Body

1. Bitterness: deep-seated anger, long-term unforgiveness... something happened a long time ago, and you just can't let it go

Illus. Chloroquin... the bitterest pill I have ever put in my mouth!!

Some people can be as bitter to interact with

- a. Persistent gloomy disposition... grumpiness... sourness... negativity... usually displayed in sharp words and complaints and slander against others
- b. Unbelievers are bitter by nature, nursing their grievances with bitter memories...
 - i) They have a thin veneer of joviality over a long memory of a lifetime of hurts, beginning with their childhood

Nursing grievances: Illus.

At one time, William Randolph Hearst had the world's largest private zoo... at the Hearst Castle in San Simeon, CA... it had African and Asian antelope, zebras, both Bactrian (two-humped) and dromedary (one-humped) camels, sambar deer from India, red deer from Europe, axis deer from Asia, llamas, kangaroos, ostriches, emus, Barbary sheep, Alaskan big horned sheep, musk oxen and yaks. As many as four giraffes were kept in a small pen located next to the road... the animals were fed meticulously and regularly by a veterinarian that Hearst paid full time

Imagine if we could liken our grudges to a menagerie of the mind... every day, bitter people walk through the corridors of the cages, feeding these grudges, nursing them, strengthening them

It's as though you don't ever want to forget that "so and so did such and such to me"...

- c. Non-Christians deeply struggle with this... despite all the veneer of joviality and friendliness... many get years of counseling because they are filled with bitterness
- d. Bitter people look at everything with a jaundiced eye... they see the dark side to everything; question people's motives; points out people's weakness and deficiencies and the problems

Paul said: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want."

Bitter people have learned how to be DISCONTENT in any and every situation, well-fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want.

They see the dark side, the bad side to everything... and they make people around them unhappy too

- e. That is not to say that people haven't had real griefs in their lives... real hurts, real injuries... there is SO MUCH SIN, SO MUCH pain in the world
- f. But Christians should NOT be bitter!! We should savor the SWEETNESS of God's saving grace in Christ!!

Psalm 34:8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

- g. GET RID OF ALL BITTERNESS!!
 - i) Christians have the power through the Holy Spirit to be genuinely happy, gracious, loving people...
 - ii) The key to getting rid of bitterness is, as we'll see in a moment, genuine forgiveness

2. Rage and anger

- a. Earlier Paul spoke of righteous anger... but commanded not to sin

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin.

- b. BUT HERE: the ranger of sinful anger... from normal sinful anger up to overwhelming anger, red face, veins popping

3. Brawling (clamor): amazing that Christians would even need to be told this!!

Illus. Western saloon... wild west... half-drunken cowboys and gunslingers throwing tables through windows and smashing chairs over people's heads

- a. Includes raised voices... shouting... giving full vent to your angry feelings... letting them run amok

Proverbs 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

- b. How terrifying is this list of sin!! How great a cancer it is, how far it will take us!

4. Slander (evil-speaking): coolly and with calculation saying unkind, vicious, destructive things that assassinate someone's character; Greek word is actually *blasphemy*... speaking evil of someone in the image of God

5. All forms of malice: wicked desires that plot and plan evil toward others...
malice is hatred—a deep-seated, settled determination to do someone harm...
could be related to REVENGE

Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan...

"Malice" = a deep-seated hatred based on the terrible outcome of the war—both sides could have felt that; they had lost husbands, sons, fathers, brothers... how easy it would have been to settle into a pattern of deep hatred!!

How disgusting are all these words... *bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice!!*

6. All these things GRIEVE the Holy Spirit and DESTROY the unity and health and happiness of the Body of Christ

C. Put On Godly Demeanor Toward Others... Compassion, Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1. Literally BECOME kind and compassionate to one another

The OLD WAYS have to be pushed out and the NEW WAYS in...

Lloyd-Jones: Like dead winter leaves that spend all winter on the branches of some trees are PUSHED OUT in the spring by new green leaves...

- a. We are not naturally kind, compassionate, and forgiving... this is something the Spirit has to work in us
 - b. We have to cultivate these beautiful attributes... to make these attributes INCREASINGLY part of who we are in Christ
2. Become **KIND**...
 - a. Kindness is HELPFULNESS... the opposite of bitterness
 - b. The ability to see someone's need and meet it with gladness
 - c. God's kindness to us in Christ meant our salvation

Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Titus 3:3-5 We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

- d. A KIND person seeks to alleviate suffering by specific acts... a cup of cold water on a hot day; propping/adjusting pillows behind someone who is in a sickbed; saying words of encouragement that build up the person... KINDNESS... and doing it all cheerfully, with a gentle, humble demeanor...

Joseph reassured his brothers after Jacob died and comforted them that he would not exact his revenge on them for all they'd done to him...

Genesis 50:21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Boaz showed kindness to Ruth, especially in his gentle, respectful words:

Ruth 2:8-9 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

- e. How different is that from the BITTER person, who makes your life miserable and never adds anything beneficial... bitterness ADDS to people's burdens, kindness LIGHTENS people's burdens

3. Become TENDERHEARTED (compassionate)

- a. Gentiles have become hardened in their sins, hard-hearted and calloused

Ephesians 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity... {KJV = "being past feeling..."}⁹

- b. But Christians should become very compassionate, very merciful and tender-hearted... easily moved with feeling about the condition of others around us

- c. I preached a sermon on this:

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

d. We Christians should link our hearts strongly with people around us... loving them, caring about what they're going through

4. The BEST WAY is to look to Christ

a. First: how did HE deal with other sinners?

i) He was TENDER-HEARTED... his heart melted with compassion at their plight, even in sin... how GENTLE he was with fragile sinners

Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out

ii) We can see how miserable a sinner is... even one that has sinned against us and hurt us in some way

b. Secondly: how did Christ DEAL with us in our sin? How loving has he been to us??

D. Forgiving Others

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1. Forgiving other sinners is very much the point of these verses

2. We must BECOME forgiving... learn how to forgive, deeply, from the heart

3. Being tender-hearted and humble enables us to do this to people who sin against us

a. Someone hurts us, says something thoughtless and harsh

b. We are able to realize that we have done the same things to other people in the past

c. God has forgiven us sweetly and lovingly in Christ

d. See how God has treated his enemies... those who were in opposition to him

e. We were hateful, rebellious, wicked, deserving of condemnation... God forgave us IN CHRIST

f. God looked to what Christ had done on the cross... how he shed his blood for us, and he was satisfied... he looked on us in lavish forgiveness

g. God loved us with supernatural, timeless love and chose us even when we were first rebellious

h. Christ gave himself for us fully, absorbing the wrath we deserved

Peter had asked, "How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus said amazingly, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven times." Then he told this parable:

Matthew 18:23-27 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Matthew 18:28-35 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

This is an amazing parable... and it connects perfectly with Ephesians 4:32...

God's forgiveness of a single sinner is as if that person owed 10,000 talents of gold; a talent = 75 pounds; at today's prices, that's the equivalent of 15 billion dollars!!! It was more than all the taxes collected in the entire Roman Empire in one year... our sins against our holy God are absolutely IMMEASURABLE... but God forgave it all freely through faith in Christ... but with that forgiveness comes a moral imperative... "If I have forgiven you all that debt, you MUST forgive anyone who sins against you!" Furthermore, if you DO NOT, I will not forgive you!

The servant that owed him 100 denarii, we should not imagine that was an insignificant amount... it was about 1/3 of a year's pay for a common laborer... in our day and age, it would be about 15 thousand dollars. It is not as some commentators put it "A couple of bucks." Not at all... it is a

WEIGHTY SIN... so also when we forgive others, we are sometimes forgiving some of the weightiest sins imaginable in life – abuse, persecution, physical attacks, hit and runs, even murder of loved ones...

From time to time, some Christians come into national focus because of their stunning willingness to forgive criminals who have stolen loved ones from them...they amazingly forgive:

We must be as tenderhearted and forgiving to people who sin against us as Christ was with us... AS CHRIST FORGAVE YOU!!

Thomas Watson's definition of forgiveness:

- 1) resisting revenge
- 2) not returning evil for evil
- 3) wishing them well
- 4) grieving at their calamities
- 5) praying for their welfare
- 6) seeking reconciliation as far as it depends on you
- 7) coming to their aid in distress

That's what it means to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us!!

V. Applications

- A. This Whole Chapter is Application Directly... So We Don't Have to Do Much More
- B. First and Foremost... to all Lost People: Trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins
 1. We cannot live out these ethics in a way that pleases God if we have not first been forgiven of our sins by faith in Christ!

Ephesians 4:32 forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

2. I yearn for you to know the freedom and release that comes from knowing that God has forgiven you in Christ
3. Once you do, you will get to know the quiet, powerful influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit

C. Christians: DO NOT GRIEVE the Holy Spirit of God!

1. Understand that all sin is PERSONAL... feel his personal presence in your life, and feel the personal nature of sin...
2. The most powerful negative influence against sin for a Christian is not fear of punishment, but fear of disappointing the gentle, loving Spirit of God
3. When you sin, learn to grieve as the Holy Spirit does... don't take sin lightly... take the time to be sorrowful so that the sorrow can drive out sin

D. Learn to Forgive From the Heart

1. Is there in you a spirit of bitterness? Is there anyone you are holding captive in your heart to a previous sin they've committed? LET IT GO! Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.
2. Ask God to make you as tenderhearted toward other sinners as Christ has been with you!